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THE ARMENIAN QUESTION.

ITS MEANING TO GREAT BRITAIN.

By CAPTAIN C. F. DIXON-JOHNSON.

"A great Power cannot with impunity change the fundamental principles of its attitude,"-- Metternich.

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In Asiatic Turkey there exists no geographical area which can properly be described as Armenia. Armenians chiefly reside in 9 villayets or provinces, where they form but a small minority, about 15 per cent. of the population. They live in scattered communities and are bitterly divided by religious animosities between the Gregorian, Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians. The ignorant Gregorian mountaineers of the East have nothing in common with the highly educated, shrewd Roman Catholic Armenians of Angora, Smyrna, and Constantinople, and only with difficulty can the Armenians of the North converse with the Turkish speaking Armenians of the South. According to Sir Charles Wilson's article in the "Encyclopædia Britannica."

The 9 Villayets are:—

VAN, BITLIS,
MAMURET-UL-AZIZ,
DIARBEKIR, ERZERUM,
SIVAS, ALEPPO, ADANA,
TREBIZOND.

Population:—

ARMENIANS (Gregorians, Protestants, Roman Catholics)	...	...	...	*925,000
MOSLEMS (Turks and Kurds)	...	...	...	4,460,000
GREEKS and other Christians	...	...	...	645,000
JEWS, GYPSIES, etc.	...	...	...	100,000

6,130,000

* This figure is an outside estimate.

Only the first five villayets contain a strong population of Armenians, and out of 159 Kazas or sub-districts in only 9 can the Armenians, taking the most favourable estimate, be said to be in a majority (seven of these Kazas are near Van and two near Mush).

The emigration of Armenians into Adana and Trebizond was encouraged by Russian agents, with a view to secure for Russia in the event of occupation most important harbours on the Black and Mediterranean Seas.

Turkey, in requesting the British Government to lend officials to help in the re-organization and administration of the Asiatic Provinces, fully realizes the danger of the present situation and is honestly anxious that these Provinces should be well governed, peaceful and prosperous so that no excuse may be offered for foreign intervention and to this end is quite willing that these officials while acting as her servants, should at the same time be guaranteed a free hand and should be fully supported and not obstructed in their work.

Germany is sending a generalissimo with almost plenary powers, accompanied by instructors, for the Turkish Army, and at present a staff of British naval officers is re-organizing the Ottoman Navy, and from time to time we lend officials to the Turkish Administration without any question of preference or international rights being raised.*

The reformed Government of Turkey desires to fulfil her part of the Constantinople Convention by re-organizing the Administration of her Asiatic Provinces with the help of British Officials and looks to Great Britain for the help she is entitled to expect; and so long as Great Britain remains in Cyprus she is bound by the Convention "to undertake the onerous obligation of a defensive alliance with Turkey if Russia should attempt to extend her annexations beyond the present frontiers which the present negotiations will assign." (*Letter of Lord Salisbury to M. Waddington July 7th, 1878*). Lord Salisbury, in a letter to Mr. Layard, British Ambassador at Constantinople, dated May 30th, 1878, clearly explained that the object of the proposed Convention was to avert the results which the War of 1877-78 might have in Asia. A quotation from this letter will make it clear how the recent disastrous War of 1912-13 has similarly affected the situation.

"It is impossible that Her Majesty's Government can look upon these changes with indifference. Asiatic Turkey

* Since the above was printed Russia has suddenly raised objections regarding the appointment of Lt.-General Liman Von Sanders because she realizes that the Turkish Government by granting him full authority really intends to effect a thorough reorganization of her army. As a compromise Russia suggests that Germany should support her in preventing the present rulers of Turkey from investing British officials with similar powers for the re-organization and amelioration of the Provinces in Asia. In short, the more Turkey endeavours to strengthen her position by reforms, whether civil or military, in Europe or Asia the more pronounced becomes Russian opposition.

contains populations of many different races and creeds, possessing no capacity for self-government and no aspirations for independence, but owing their tranquility and whatever prospect of political well-being they possess entirely to the rule of the Sultan. But the Government of the Ottoman dynasty is that of an ancient but still alien conqueror, resting more upon actual power than upon the sympathies of common nationality. The defeat which the Turkish arms have sustained and the known embarrassments of the Government will produce a general belief in its decadence and an expectation of speedy political change, which in the East are more dangerous than actual discontent to the stability of a Government. If the population of Syria, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia see that the Porte has no guarantee for its continued existence but its own strength, they will, after the evidence which recent events have furnished of the frailty of that reliance, begin to calculate upon the speedy fall of the Ottoman domination, and to turn their eyes towards its successor. Even if it be certain that Batoum and Ardahan and Kars will not become the base from which emissaries of intrigue will issue forth, to be in due time followed by invading armies, the mere retention of them by Russia will exercise a powerful influence in disintegrating the Asiatic dominion of the Porte. As a monument of feeble defence on the one side, and a successful aggression on the other, they will be regarded by the Asiatic population as foreboding the course of political history in the immediate future, and will stimulate, by the combined action of hope and fear, devotion to the Power which is in the ascendant, and desertion of the Power which is thought to be falling into decay."

Russia is said to have objected to the right of Turkey to select the European officials whether British or others for employment in Kurdistan to carry out the necessary reforms, Under Article LXI. of the Treaty of Berlin the Sublime Porte undertook to carry out reforms in the provinces inhabited by Armenians and to periodically make known the steps taken to this effect to the Powers who will superintend their application. This Article in no way committed the Porte to an acceptance of International Control in these Provinces as is clearly shewn by Lord Salisbury's letter to Mr. Layard, dated May 30th, 1878, in which he says:—"The determination of the reforms to be accomplished in Europe has been intrusted by the Treaty of Berlin to a European

Commission to be specially nominated for that purpose. But in reference to the reforms to be accomplished in Asia a different course has been adopted. . . . The measures required specially for the Armenians are by the Treaty of Berlin to be determined in the first instance by the Sultan, but they are to be communicated to the other signatories of the Treaty, who reserve the right to supervise the application of them."

Russia, as a counter proposal, suggests forcing upon Turkey a scheme of International control which would practically abolish the sovereignty of Turkey in her own dominions and which, as an insult to their national prestige, would be most distasteful to the great majority of the inhabitants and would probably lead to their giving vent to their wrath by persecuting the small minority, whom they would naturally consider responsible.

The ferocity of the Kurd would increase in the very proportion that the Turk lost prestige. Surely the British Government should beware of becoming an accessory to foisting a scheme which is bound to end so disastrously.

Russia's reasons for objecting are because :—

- (1) Once British officials were installed along the frontiers of Kurdistan, her facilities for smuggling in arms and for sending in agents provocateurs to stir up troubles would be very much curtailed
- (2) The country would be in closer touch with the European Press and the British officials on the spot would fearlessly report the true facts.
- (3) Under good government the Provinces would speedily become prosperous and contented and Turkey herself would be in a proportionately stronger financial and military position.
- (4) And the excuse for intervention would then cease to exist.

By suggesting International control, Russia hopes that one of two things may happen, either :—

- (1) That Turkey will refuse point blank, and even if she subsequently consents it will take so long a time to appoint the commission that next Spring or even later Russia will be still free to provoke disturbance, an abortive rising followed by Kurdish retaliation, giving her an excuse for direct invasion.
- (2) Or that if the Commission is appointed her claim to be the most interested as being the neighbouring state will be accepted and that, in consequence, she will have the preponderating influence in the appointment of the officials, who would really become Russian agents to create disturbances which must lead to eventual intervention, on the ground that this was the only possible solution.

The failure of international administration to restrain the organised bands of disorder sent in by outside agencies under Russian auspices resulted in the state of anarchy and suffering throughout the Balkan provinces which culminated in the two recent terrible wars. Yet, as one of the leading Liberal journals in this country recently stated, three out of every four of the people of Macedonia would be delighted to-day to see the 'Turks back again. All friends of the Turks and the Armenians must dread the terrible conditions which Russian agency would provoke before actual intervention came and what might happen after such intervention may well baffle description.

It is absurd to suggest that the Turk, with proper training cannot become a good and enlightened administrator; he is acknowledged by those who know him best to be honest and humane. Sir Adam Block has said that he found the Turks employed in the service of the Ottoman debt very capable of doing the work allotted to them; nor are those who saw the marvellous energy with which Nechet Bey and his Chief of the Staff, Fethy Bey, organised from nothing the successful resistance against the Italian attack in Tripoli willing to believe that the Turk is effete and played out and incapable of administration. What Turkey, however, does lack is a trained body of officials to replace the rotten and

medieval system which has been swept away. She not only requires British officials to administer the Asiatic provinces, where probably the greatest causes of friction between Armenian and Kurd are usury on the one hand and brigandage on the other,* but she requires also a special staff to run a model province, where a selected body of able men can be instructed in all the particular branches which appertain to an honest and progressive administration—police, judiciary, civic organisation, education, agriculture, irrigation, taxation, hospitals, medicine, sanitation, etc., etc.

No country is better able than Great Britain, with her experience in India and Egypt, to help Turkey with such a scheme. The true Armenian is more interested in the peaceful occupation of accumulating wealth, whether as a small farmer, shopkeeper, trader, or financial agent (usurer), than in meddling with politics which entails personal danger and the risk of losing his hard-earned savings. Despite the admitted faults of his race he is on the other hand a good cultivator, good man of business, frugal, sober, industrious, tenacious of his beliefs, and yet adaptable to circumstances.

Until 1877-78 the Armenian's relations with his Kurdish neighbours were not unfriendly; raids by the latter were non-political and non-sectarian, Moslem and Christian suffered equally. Then until the death of Alexander II. there followed a period of active propaganda by Russian Consuls; these agents founded schools, encouraged the Armenian language and inculcated the belief in a future Armenian kingdom under Russian protection, a state in which the minute and despised minority were to lord it over the proud Moslem. Incensed and suspicious, the Kurd no longer regarded the Armenian merely as a beast to be fattened and periodically bled. Indifference turned to hatred and worse followed when, encouraged by the success of the murderous bands in Bulgaria, revolutionary committees were formed in Tiflis and various European Capitals whence bands of nihilists, financed by blackmail levied on the rich Armenian bankers and traders in Europe and America, were sent into

* The Armenian peasant in many instances suffers more from the extortions of his wealthier compatriot than he does from any pillage by the Kurd.

these unhappy districts of Asia to stir up strife and bloodshed. Disowned and distrusted by the resident Armenians and by the priesthood these wretches did not hesitate to wreak their vengeance on their own people. There were even murders and shootings in the streets of London. Rich and peaceful Armenians were terrorised and blackmailed in New York until at length the police unearthed the conspiracy and found cellars full of bombs and revolvers ready for use not in Asia but in America.

The Armenian peasant has seen his dream of independence turn to a nightmare, with a horrible awakening. He realizes the value of Russian friendship and has heard of the persecution and forced conversion of his brethren under Russian rule ; he knows now how, when deceived by Russian agents and self-seeking revolutionaries he suffered the tortures of hell, it was Russia that refused to join Great Britain in intervention on his behalf.

The Turkish government has readily recognised the capacity of loyal Armenians by raising them to the highest offices of the state. The present regime is not only particularly well disposed to the more highly educated Armenians but also to the peasantry whom they consider the hardest working and best tax paying element in the Empire. Their Turkish and Kurdish neighbours are not forgetful that during the recent Balkan war the Armenians proved themselves men of greater courage than they were credited with and loyally fought by the side of their Moslem fellow countrymen when Greek and Bulgar deserted from the ranks. Russia foresees the danger of a settlement, and Russian agents are secretly at work in every province and in every hamlet urging the downfall of the Turk, setting Kurd against Armenian and Armenian against Kurd. The Revolutionary Committees, well provided with funds, are also preparing for an active campaign.

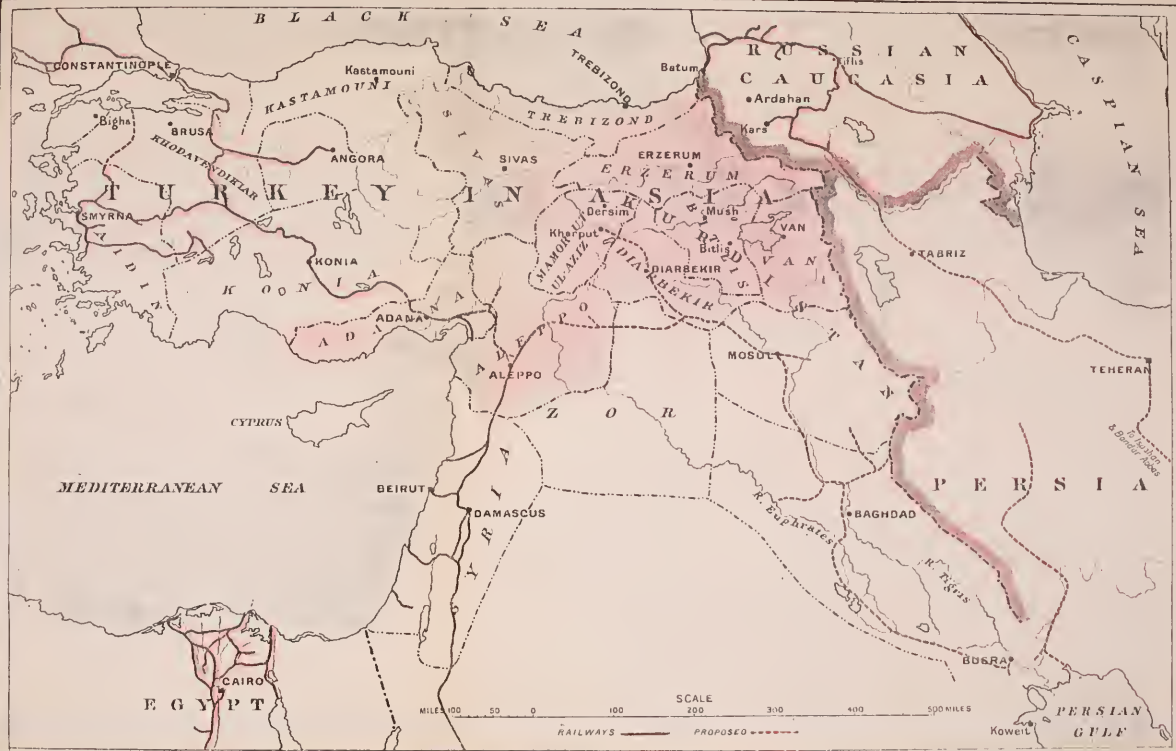
For the sake of humanity Great Britain must accede to the urgent Turkish request for support and for administrators.

But apart from altruistic ideals the strategic effects of any further advance of Russia into Asiatic Turkey requires the most serious consideration in respect to the Persian Gulf

and our Indian Empire. On the other hand a strong Turkey on the flank with the promise of British support might well deter Russia from making a hostile movement through Persia against the Indian frontier

The occupation of Kurdistan by Russia would very seriously affect British Commerce. The annual import of cotton piece goods alone from this country to the Asiatic Provinces of Turkey has during the last three years averaged annually £3,679,656. Once these provinces were occupied by Russia, a prohibitive tariff in favour of her own subsidized cotton factories would involve a serious diminution in the imports from this country. On the other hand, once the country became more peaceful and prosperous under the present rule, the potentialities of British trade would be enormously increased.

Another war and the unsettlement for the months preceding it would intensify the present financial difficulties not only in this country but throughout the world. The City of London is passing through one of the worst years on record and a further period of stress and strain would have the most disastrous results. In their own interests therefore, and those of investors in general, who have seen such a heavy depreciation in the capital value of their securities, the City should combine in urging upon the Government the importance of complying with Turkey's request for British officials, who could safely be trusted to perform their duties uninfluenced by foreign policies.







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